

## **City Branding and multicultural studies: a study of the inhabitants' image of Cuernavaca, Mexico using a quantitative approach and online surveys**

### **Abstract**

Cuernavaca has always hold a positive image as a touristic destination and a good place to raise your children, however this has changed in the last decade. Drug war and corruption have made of Cuernavaca one of the most dangerous cities in Mexico. The local government has focused on trying to fix Cuernavaca's image for national and international tourists but has forgotten of its inhabitants. On this study we focused on this group: the people living in Cuernavaca for more than ten years and we found that the image hold by them and the image projected by the government are opposite. Here we present an insight of Cuernavaca's inhabitants thoughts and feelings regarding their city and how the government can use this information to work on better public policies so the projected and perceived image of Mexico internally and externally will be more positive and consistent.

Keywords: Latin America; Mexico; place branding; negative images of cities.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data were collected via the social media (Facebook and LinkedIn) and e-mail. There were a total of 113 respondents, therefore the data for this survey are not representative to Cuernavaca's inhabitants' thoughts about their city. However, during the data collection process several factors affected the collection of the data so in order to avoid the same problems in further research; these factors will be addressed shortly. First of all, although Cuernavaca has a 300 000 population, only 23 out of 100 households have access to the Internet [INEGI, 2010]. This explains why the demographics from the respondents tend to be from people with higher education studies. Furthermore, nowadays Mexico is going through difficult social-political moments where the population does not trust their Government or anything that has to do with it [Trejo, 2014]. Since this is a survey that aims to know the views of people about their hometown, the researcher that conducted the study in Cuernavaca received feedback from different respondents saying that they did not believe on the survey or that they thought it was biased. This might have to do with the fact that the name of the University conducting this study (Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg) was not stated on the survey.

For the analysis, for processing the quantitative data MAXQDA was used, and for the qualitative data content analysis was used. With regard to the qualitative part of the study, the software used to collect the data didn't allow to have a scale from 1 to 5, there was a variable 0 (zero) by default. Although it was stated that the grading scale was from 1 to 5, several participants did use the number 0 as a variable. For the purpose of this study, the answers valued in zero will not be taken into consideration.

## **Research Findings**

The data for Cuernavaca was analyzed following an in-depth study previously done about the city, which is stated under the literature review. With regard to leisure activities (cultural events, entertainment and touristic activities), they were considered as well valued by the inhabitants and the Government. However, the poor conditions of the streets and public transport were highly criticized by the inhabitants.

The most salient discussion over the study was about the high levels of insecurity and violence that is living the city nowadays [Muedano, 2015]. 49 % of respondents agreed that the criminality in the city has reached disturbing levels, and 70 % of the participants stated that the city of Cuernavaca does not provide them with safety for their children and grandchildren. However, even though people showed their concern regarding the violence lived in the city at the moment, they didn't show a lot of interest in following the Government's plans to tackle this problem. Therefore, it is recommended that the Government launches some strategies in order to raise people's awareness about what has been done to bring peace to the city and also to let the inhabitant from Cuernavaca understand that in order to change the situation of the city (which concerns them a lot), they need to participate actively along with the Government.

Following the concerns from the participants with regard to the violence lived in Cuernavaca at the moment, it was very surprising to find that although they are aware of the negative influence that violence and drugs bring to the image of the city, when they are questioned about their first thought about Cuernavaca, the most salient answer was "Cuernavaca is the... City of the Eternal Spring". At a first instance, this does not make sense, there are two very different images regarding a same city and problem; however this has a very easy answer, "the City of the Eternal Spring" has been Cuernavaca's slogan for a very long time, it has been said that Alexander von Humboldt was the one that gave this city that denomination. Therefore, this slogan is very well fixed into Cuernavaca's inhabitants. However, although "the City of the Eternal Spring" was stated by 20% of the respondents, other participants made some changes to the slogan in order to express their negative feelings about the city, for example, they say that "Cuernavaca is the... City of the Eternal Shootings", or "...the City of the eternal Criminality". These negative images that are based on a very

important concept for Cuernavaca should be taken into consideration by the local Government for further city branding campaigns.

Furthermore, the ecological context of the City was of big concern for the participants whom stated that it has not been taken into consideration, as it should, by the local Government when developing public policies. Also, respondents said that the particular nature found in the City is a salient characteristic of Cuernavaca for both locals and tourists. Therefore, it is advised that the Government takes more interest on working on public policies regarding the ecological context of the city.

Finally, with regard to the sources consulted by the inhabitants for being up to date with regard to the situation in Cuernavaca, newspapers and the Internet were the sources preferred by respondents followed by word-of-mouth (WOM). It should be considered that the average age of participants was of 43 years-old, therefore, a lot of participants are digital literates.

## **Conclusions and further research**

The weaker points of Cuernavaca at the moment are the low levels of trust and confidence that the inhabitants have in their local Government. Strategies should be taken into action in order to increase the Government's credibility and thus the active participation of civilians.

This study was conducted in collaboration with the Ural Federal University, therefore, adjustments to the study were done for each of the cities, in the case of this report to the study of Cuernavaca. However, the multicultural approach of the study gave each of the researchers the opportunity to compare images (positive and negative), experiences and ideas around the same topic but in different cities around the world. Russian, English, Catalan, and Spanish were the languages used on this study, an in-depth study of the methodology process for developing the survey, collecting and analyzing the data should be conducted for the area of city branding.

## **References**

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